



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony for FY '23 February 16, 2022

Good evening, Chairman Walker, Chairman Osten and Members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Collin Provost, President of Council 4 AFSCME Local 391. I am also speaking for Sean Howard, President of Local 387 and Mike Vargo, President of Local 1565.

Correction employees are very staff short. Some of this is due to Covid. But much is due to retirements and stress departures. At the same time, new rules have increased the need for staff.

There has been a substantial increase in inmate recreation time and a diminishing of the tools that are traditionally used by corrections staff to control assaultive behavior. This has greatly increased the need for more corrections staff to keep facilities safe. Some of the new staff leave when they see what a challenging and stressful profession that corrections is.

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Ninety percent of inmates are routinely not assaultive. But the small number who are, cause gigantic disruptions in running corrections institutions. This small number of predatory inmates mostly pick on or assault other inmates. Occasionally they assault staff.

The assaultive population has normally been controlled by the use of administrative segregation. This is not solitary confinement. It is a step down program to encourage inmates to not assault and to behave in a community. This was normally a 90 day program where an inmate is single celled but receives several daily visits from staff, receives recreation and has access to television. Under the new executive order an inmate can only be in administrative segregation for a maximum of 15 days. Then the inmate must be given a 45 day buffer. This has made the administrative segregation program much less effective. This has led to the need for more staff.

More staff is needed to keep eyes on inmates and to administer the great increase in recreation time that the executive order has mandated. Most assaults occur during recreation. Corrections facilities are not built to have so many inmates out of cell at a time. The only way to handle this safely is to increase staff

Covid and the new executive order has increased staff stress. We are seeing larger numbers of staff retire. Also, pensions are being diminished for those working past July 1 of this year. This is leading to a wave of seasoned staff leaving.

Also, please provide sufficient funds to restore the annual week of in-class training for staff. Training has degenerated into computer screen training. It is not effective. The General Assembly instituted a new use of force and reporting standard for corrections employees. It only seems appropriate that our members be trained for it.

We do not want to be alarmist. But we are not doing our duty if we do not warn you that there is currently insufficient staff. Insufficient staffing increases danger in Connecticut's corrections facilities

We would be happy to provide any further information. Thank you for your consideration.